

PIKES (family Esocidae)

Northern pike

Esox lucius



Similar Species: Tiger muskellunge, muskellunge

Identification: Light spots on dark background, five or fewer pores on lower jaw, cheeks fully scaled. (Muskellunge has a pattern of dark marks on light background, no scales on lower half of cheek, and 6-10 pores on lower jaw.)

Northern pike are a popular sportfish common statewide in South Dakota and are found in a variety of habitats including lakes, rivers, ponds, and impoundments. In rivers, northern pike avoid strong current. The northern pike diet consists primarily of fish, but they have been known to eat insects and other small invertebrates and sometimes small birds and mammals. Spawning occurs during spring over vegetation soon after the ice melts. Northern pike grow rapidly and may reach lengths of 16 inches in the first year of life in South Dakota waters. They are well adapted to South Dakota waters and are able to survive all but the most extreme conditions.

